1;Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
AX5 Vedda AX5

putation when he first joined our party, but it was very soon evident that he was handier, quicker and more intelligent in every way than the other peasant Sinhalese with whom we came in contact. Still later we discovered that by his influence a large clearing had been illegally made in a remote part of the jungle near Nuwaragala, and that on account of this he was doing his best to prevent our coming in contact with the Sitala Wanniya Veddas in whose territory the clearing had been made. Although in this he played us false and caused much needless trouble we found him in other matters a perfectly trustworthy witness, and as he had associated more or less constantly with the Kovil Vanamai Veddas from the age of 10 to 20, there is every reason to accept his account of their condition 25 years ago. At this time there were about 50 families, i.e. some 200 people, who led a wandering hunting life for half of the year, during which time they lived in rock shelters and depended largely on honey; for the rest of the year they paid more or less attention to chena cultivation, growing especially maize and *kurakkan* (*Eleusine coracana*). Two or three families—not necessarily the same year after year—would usually wander and hunt together; such groups of families might also make chenas together, though five or six families would often join to make a single chena.

Although they had a few guns even 20 years ago, bows and arrows were in common use and much of their hunting consisted of monkey drives. There were no mixed Sinhalese and Vedda chenas then. The Arachi remembers three caves belonging to the ancestors of the present Bandaraduwa Veddas, viz. Walimbagalagalge, Ellavellagalge and Vianbendegalge. Each family was the recognised possessor of one or more rocky hills on which there were colonies of the rock bee, but the whole of the small hunting community would join to collect honey from each hill and the honey was always equally shared.

The Kovil Vanamai Veddas belonged to Morane and Unapane and Uru *waruge*. The latter lived apart near Uniche, i.e. between Tumpalamcholai and the coast. The Arachi states that the language has altered during the last 20 years, Tamil tending to displace Sinhalese, thus *tirakodoi*, "nothing," is said

1;Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
AX5 Vedda AX5

CHAPTER IV

FAMILY LIFE

THE family life of the wilder Veddas centres round the rock-shelters which are truly their homes, and even among those Veddas who practise chena cultivation, but have not formed permanent settlements, these rock-shelters play an important part, the movements of the community or family group from shelter to shelter being regulated according to season and available food supply. Our experience leads us to believe that the wilder Veddas so greatly prefer rock-shelters to huts that they seldom build the latter, preferring rather to face the inconvenience of travelling some distance daily in search of food, and even to camp for the night under some temporary shelter. Except in this particular Nevill's description of the movements of a Vedda family still holds good if it be remembered that he applies the term "Village Vaedda" to any Vedda who makes even the roughest chena. "The Forest Vaedda forms a home two or three times a year, as the season demands. Thus in the dry hot months when brooks and ponds dry up, the game collects in the low forests around the half dried river beds. He then takes his wife and children, aged parents or crippled relatives, and settles them in a hut close to a place where water can be got. From this he makes his hunting forays, and returns to it with his game. The rain sets in however, and the iguanas, deer, pigs, etc. are scattered over the country; the elk then seek rocky hills, and are followed by the Vaedda. The little household goods, the children, and family party, again are moved up to the high ground, avoiding the malaria that now hangs as a shroud over the forest-clad lowlands. Here, if possible, a cave is chosen for the home, and improved by a slight roof in front, if

342
221
592

1:Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
AK5 Vedda AK5

too exposed, and around this the food winner ranges.... Besides his high-ground residence, and his low-ground residence, if a tract of forest burst suddenly into flower that attracts vast swarms of bees, or into useful fruit, the family will make a little pic-nic party, and go there for a week or month, if it be too far from the home for daily visits. He cannot, however, be called 'nomadic,' any more than the European who has a town house, and country house, though the climate during the dry season calls for so trifling a shelter, that a permanent house is not required....

"The village Vaedda was originally, and indeed is still, distinguished as one who had added grain cultivation to hunting, honey collecting, and yam digging. When he moved into summer quarters, he set to work and felled a suitable lot of forest and burned it off, in the intervals of hunting. When the rain approached, he put up a hut that would keep his family dry, on this cleared space, and scattered grain seed over the charred surface. Leaving such food as they had stored for use then, in charge of his family, he would go off for days together to the high ground in search of elk, lodging as before in caves. When the weather cleared, and the grain ripened, they collected it, paid away small shares to other less provident clansmen, who had during the wet season sent the family little presents of flesh, while the father was away, and then away they went to another dry season division of their territory, where the mininnas and iguanas abounded. There is thus little difference between the forest and the village Vaedda, except that the latter makes his dry season home sufficiently substantial to keep out rain as well as dew, and that he leaves his family there, and does not take them to the high ground. He has never yet learned to make his clearing into a field or garden, or his six months' hut into a permanent home. We now come to the dwellings themselves. Where an overhanging rock can be found, it is of course sufficient. Otherwise any rock is chosen, and some sticks being laid sloping in front of it, it is roughly thatched with twigs, rushes, and large pieces of bark. A few elk hides, if not bought up by pedlars, will form a screen at one end. If it is only to exclude dew a very few branches or bits of bark suffice[1]."

[1] *Taprobanian*, Vol. I, 1886, p. 186.

123 We had hardly gained the base of the rock when we heard human voices and soon came up with three men and their dogs. One fellow [411 carried a gun, the others had axes hitched to their shoulders. They 412 were on their way to a devil dancing ceremony at a house of illness some miles away; but abandoning their project they accompanied us to their homes.

621 In a small clearing stood half a dozen leafy shelters. Outside one of [342] these, three women with infants at the breast were seated roasting small yellow flowers. The rest of their people were at work on a *chena** close [162] by. We summoned them and soon we had all the Veddas of the *Kosgaha* [164] *Ulpotta* before us—some six or eight men and about a dozen women and [146] children. They were a poor lot bearing the stigmata of malaria and framboesia. There was but one old man among them. The children were emaciated and languid.

144 Most of them showed strong traces of Tamil admixture, especially 177 the women; what poor ornaments they wore, their clothing, and even their very names were Tamil; and so were their predilections if the coy smiles one or two of them bestowed on the fine Tamil that accompanied us signified anything. There were at least three men, however, true to 142 Vedda type—short of stature, wild-eyed, with beardless face and upstanding frizzly hair.

411 They had no bows among them, except as playthings for the children, 524 but made us one as a memento and stained it with charcoal and *thimbiri* to give it the appearance of use.

342 The huts were fashioned of wattle and leaves, and thatched with dry 415 grass. Their domestic appointments comprised earthen pots, a wooden pestle and mortar, bark rope, and a deer skin or two.

262 Fruits, flowers, wild yams, honey, the flesh of animals, *kurrukhan*† 224 and maize formed their food. The meat they fancied most was that of 231 the langur and monitor lizard which they hunted with the lazy mongrels that loitered about. They eat abundantly and at any hour when food 264 is plentiful; but as a rule one good meal a day is all they expect; in 26 times of dearth they bear hunger stoically, chewing incessantly a few 415 varieties of bark they carry in pouches fashioned of cloth saturated with melted wax (*itee reihee*). Partial nomads, they spend many months 221 of the year under trees and in caves. Where the *palu*, *veera*, *kong*, or 222 *mora*‡ fruit is ripe, where the hives are, there they take their women and children, dogs, and chattels and go.

515 "How often do you bathe?" I asked one of them, the smell of their ring-wormed bodies suggesting little acquaintance with water.

"What bathing for us," he replied. "We fall into a stream once in a way and get out again; that is our bath. And we only do that when our stomachs are full. When we are hungry we don't care for anything; we can eat even a man then!"

804 In answer to the question how they measured distances and what constituted a mile, the reply was, "We walk till our legs hurt, then we [276] place our axes on the ground, sit down, take out our pouches, and chew a quid; that is our mile".

---

[137] *A patch of forest cleared for cultivation

†*Eleusine coracana*

‡*Minusops hexandra, Hemicyclia sepiaria, Schleichera trijuga, Nephelium longana,* respectively.

5: Spittel D-5 (ca. 1920) 1945 AX5 Vedda AX5

to a cleft fragment of stone resembling a giant lizard crawling up the sheer face of the rock.

We found Bowala deserted. The young coconut and areca palms, plantains, sugar-canes and pine-apples there were choked with grass and lantana. The huts were falling to pieces and leaked like sieves as we found to our cost when a shower overtook us; the grass thatch, ruined by white ants, was the home of innumerable rats, brahmin-lizards and poisonous *karawalas** that hung head-down from the rafters ready to strike.

The desolate state of the hamlet is explainable by the *chena* life of the people. In December, as the crops ripen, they forsake their homes for the shacks of the *chena*, leaving perhaps an aged couple behind. In April, when the crops of *kurrukkan* and maize have been taken, they return to the village to repair their huts and wean back to life such plants as have survived the inroads of wild animals and weeds. In July, *chena* land is leased again; and so the wasteful routine is repeated. A hamlet occupied for six months and abandoned for six has not much chance of headway. If the population of a village is at all numerous, there are sufficient people to occupy both *chena* and village, without detriment to either; if the community is very small they remain *chena* dwellers with no permanent homes; if intermediate, we find the state of things at Bowala. In favoured places a mere nucleus of human beings swells in time to a thriving and populous village. But in the insalubrious *Vanni* privation and ignorance keep the numbers low. Two dwindling villages may combine to save one from extinction. Often a place populous to-day is a wilderness to-morrow and *vice versa*. This is typical of the kaleidoscopic way the forest hamlets change. Names so fine on maps—Illukpitiya, Mahaella, Embillene—are found when reached to be derelict; a crumbling hut perhaps hidden in jungle, or a hardy tamarind or palmyrah the sole witness of vanished homes.

Bowala folk are better jungle men than many farther inland. Though far from fastidious in their choice of meats, for they eat the mongoose and rat, they abhor the porcupine, sure mark of Vedda ancestry. They fashion bags of beaten *riti* bark and carry pouches of monkey skin that ladies might envy. Their bed-frames are spanned with sambur-hide, their powder flasks are the dried scrota of sambur. A monkey skin, stretched over a coconut shell fitted with handle, screw and string, and manipulated with a small bow, serves them as a violin out of which they scrape mournful disharmonies. They snare the smaller animals, such as the hare, pangolin and chevrotan, with *habbakas* or weighted frames poised over passages used by these animals; we saw one of these set for chevrotan with a bundle of urine-drenched leaves for bait. Some among them could brave the formidable heights of Westminster Abbey in quest of the combs of the rock bee—the most hazardous of jungle pursuits.

We spent the night in a large cave at the base of Westminster Abbey and made the ascent next morning, replenishing our water bottles at a small basin formed by the buttressing roots of a rock-tamarind and rejoicing in the grandiloquent name, for so trivial a thing, of *Kothuru-pathaha* (gnat-water-hole).

It had rained all night and there was still a drizzle. Squeezing through crevices, crouching through low caves, climbing trees, clinging to rough

*Small venomous snakes.

5: Spittel D-5 (ca. 1920) 1945 AX5 Vedda AX5

2. VEDDA CHARACTERISTICS, RELIGION, AND SUPERSTITION

If 'tis not a true philosophy
That the spirit when set free,
Still lingers about its olden home,
In the flower and the tree,
It is very strange that our pulses thrill
At the sight of a voiceless thing,
And our hearts yearn so with tenderness
In the beautiful time of Spring.

N. P. WILLIS

241 181 THE genuine Vedda is a quite incompetent agriculturist; that is a mark by which you may know him; and none are more so than the Veddas of Bingoda who can no more develop a *chena* than they can fly. They will make a fine beginning; valiantly fell trees and sow grain; but there it ends; whenever the mood seizes them they leave it all and go into the forest, and the wild animals wander in. This is why I consider the Veddas [184] of Bingoda the most primitive I have met; better even than the classical Veddas of Henebedde and Danigala who are more of the agriculturist and less of the hunter.

● 221 222 177 Though these Veddas live close to Sinhalese settlements, they spend a large part of their time in the jungle. When the forests have much to give—as in January and February, the good yam months, and June and July, the honey and fruits months—the Veddas take their families and forsake their huts for caves and stream-beds; here to-day, there to-morrow. But in times of jungle impoverishment—March to May, and September to December—they remain near the village, where at a pinch they can beg a pittance of grain; but even then foraging parties frequently wander forth and return in a few days with honey, flesh and swiftlets' nests for barter.

144 142 There is, almost certainly, no Vedda to-day without some trace of Sinhalese (or Tamil) blood in his veins; a reason why anthropometry is so often arid of results; still, one can usually tell a Vedda from a Sinhalese at a glance: The sparsity of hair on the Vedda's face is his outstanding characteristic, in marked contrast to the heavily bearded Sinhalese; add to this a darker complexion, a shorter stature, a greater reserve, simplicity, and apathy, and an easily aroused ferocity of nature—and there is no more to be said. But Kaurala of Kotlinde would have [826] it there was a further distinction: "See," said he, placing my hand on his Adam's apple. "I am a true Vedda; where is my throat-knot?"

181 Veddas are an independent folk. They are no respectors of persons; and if you wish to know them, it does not do to stand on your dignity. Displease them, and they will not come near you; treat them kindly and they are your good friends. Childish and ingenuous to a degree, they will address you on equal terms, and often show an embarrassing